DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 330 651 SP 032 952

AUTHOR Skelton, Sarah C.; Harris, Michelle C.
TITLE Practitioners Opinions Concerning Preservice Training of Middle Level Teachers.
PUB DATE Feb 91
NOTE 16p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association of Teacher Educators (71st, New Orleans, LA, February 16-20, 1991).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adolescents; *Developmental Stages; Elementary School Teachers; Higher Education; Individual Development; Intermediate Grades; Junior High Schools; *Middle Schools; *Preservice Teacher Education; Questionnaires; *Student Characteristics; Student Needs; *Teacher Attitudes; *Teacher Education Programs
IDENTIFIERS Alabama; *Transescents

ABSTRACT

The onset of adolescence brings with it significant changes in the biological, social, and emotional growth and development of students. In an attempt to meet the needs of transescents (early adolescents aged 10-14) middle level programs have been developed and implemented. However, preparation of teachers to work specifically with middle level students has been neglected to a large degree. To remedy this situation, research efforts must be directed toward the needs of teachers working at the middle school level as well as the needs of preservice teachers seeking middle school credentials. Based on the needs indicated by the literature review, the current study explores the opinions of practitioners regarding the need for specialized training at the preservice level. The faculty, all middle school practitioners, (N=50) at 2 public middle schools in rural Alabama were asked to participate in this study by responding to a questionnaire; the return rate of the questionnaires was 68 percent. Twenty-seven respondents answered favorably concerning the need for specialized instruction of preservice middle school teachers. Twenty-eight respondents answered favorably concerning the uniqueness of needs by middle school students. According to the questionnaire results, a number of middle school practitioners feel that preservice teachers in the area of middle school education would benefit from classes with special emphasis on the development and unique needs of transescent students. This information leads to the conclusion that increased specialized classes, including field experiences, should be recommended for exploration or implementation at the college level. (AMH)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED330651

Practitioners Opinions Concerning Preservice Training of Middle Level Teachers

Sarah C. Skelton, EdD and Michelle C. Harris

University of Montevallo

College of Education

Montevallo, Alabama

35115

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

S. Skelton

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

SP 032 952

Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association of Teacher Educators, New Orleans, Louisiana, February, 1991

Abstract

The onset of adolescence brings with it significant changes in the biological, social and emotional growth and development of students. The primary purpose of this paper is to describe the characteristics unique to the middle level student. The second and foremost goal of this paper is to present the results of a survey which dealt with opinions of middle school practitioners concerning the need of specialized training at the college level for preservice teachers who plan to work with middle level students.

Practitioners Opinions Concerning Preservice Training

Middle school teachers must understand the unique needs of their students. The onset of adolescence brings with it significant changes in the biological, social, and emotional growth and development of students between the ages of ten and fourteen. Because of these changes, it is imperative that preservice teachers who intend to work with these middle level students be provided with specialized training. The primary purpose of this paper is to describe the unique characteristics of the middle level student. The second goal of this paper is to present a survey of opinions concerning the need of preservice training as seen by current practitioners in middle level schools.

Background

The term "adolescence" is derived from a Greek term which means "to grow up." The term transescent was coined by Eichhorn to describe the group of early adolescents between the ages of ten and fourteen (Eichhorn, 1966). Other than the stage of life between zero and two years of age, the greatest amount of physical growth occurs during the

transescent period. The major difference between these two stages is that the transescent is aware of the changes.

Changes that take place during the transescent period include biological, social emotional, and intellectual development. The most significant and evident changes are those related to the rapid physical growth and development. Increases in height, weight, and muscular strength occur at a swift rate; therefore, many transescents have problems with coordination and are labeled as awkward. The change in the rate of metabolism causes differing levels of energy which vary from great activity to need for rest. During the period between the ages of ten and fourteen, sexual maturation causes the transescents a great deal of self-consciousness about their bodies. According to research, some patterns developed during this self-conscious age have lasting effects into adulthood (Eichhorn, 1966; Drash, 1980).

The problems and distress for transescents related to their biological development is often made more complex by the changes in their social relationships. Friendships are of extreme importance during the stage. According to Manning, transescents need for belonging and acceptance is heightened (Manning, 1989). Transescents, while at times quite egocentric, are extremely concerned with the development of acceptance by peers. This can lead to the development of a "personal

fable" in which the transescent is the most important part of his world which is made up, to a great extent by peers (Elkind, 1967).

The rapid rate of emotional change in the transescent stage of life has been the topic of a number of research efforts (Hill, 1980; Dorman and Lipsitz, 1981; Elkind, 1967). Extreme emotions are noticeable to anyone who lives or works with this age group. The display of emotion is directly related to the biological changes occurring during this period. The major changes taking place during the emotional growth and development lead the transescent to alter self-concepts (Clark and Clark, 1987). Positive emotional growth needs to be encouraged through a supportive environment.

Intellectual development is directly related to all other aspects of growth for the transescent. The ability to think about thinking is a characteristic of this age group. The intellectual change from the concrete to formal or abstract may occur at different times for different students (Epstein and Toepfer, 1978; Strahon and Toepfer, 1984). Careful planning in teaching strategies must be utilized to provide this unique group of students with opportunities for learning.

The physical, emotional, and intellectual characteristics of transescents have significant implications for educators. According to Popejoy, the middle school level is different from elementary and high

school (Popejoy, 1980). The most successful middle schools are those which are willing to adapt school practices to meet the individual differences of students (Lipsitz, 1984). The perceptions teachers have about the students in this age group have a major impact on the teaching as well as learning process (Manning, 1989). Good middle-school teachers familiarize themselves with their students and plan teaching strategies which will enable students to move forward to their learning potential (George, 1988). It is imperative that the middles school educator understand the diversity of students and feel at ease in working on a daily basis with the changing needs and energy required to provide a quality educational environment.

Review of the Literature

The middle school concept has a major goal to meet the needs of the transescent stage student. In order to accomplish this goal, middle school teachers must be ready to accept and implement programs which will be effective for middles school students (Kasak, 1988). While this is a formidable expectation, it has led to negative opinions of teaching at the middle school level (Alexander and McEwin, 1984).

Another reason for the negative outlook concerning the middle school may be derived rom the preservice training of middle school

teachers. Preparation of teachers specifically to work with students at the middle school level has been neglected to a large degree (Roach, Bell, and Salmeri, 1989-90). One suggested reason for this seemingly neglectful attitude by educators is based on the fact that many states do not have a separate endorsement for middle school teachers, but include or provide an additional endorsement for teachers only in elementary or secondary education (Manning, 1989-90). Furthermore, according to Alexander and McEwin, there has been only a "3% increase since 1981 in the number of AACTE institutions offering programs for middle level teacher preparations" (Alexander and McEwin, 1988).

At those schools where courses are taught which specifically relate to the middle school concept, there is a definite need for improvement in both curriculum and instruction (Roach, Bell, and Salmeri, 1989-90). Even though middle school courses are available, the course content in some instances focuses on the student "in the middle" as applies to instructional strategies which may be implemented. Information concerning the needs and development of transescents has often been ignored in middle school courses (Roach, Bell, and Salmeri, 1989-90). The need for courses which provide experiences in middle school settings for preservice teachers as well as courses which develop an understanding of the unique needs of the middle school student are evident. Less frustration on the part of

beginning teachers would be beneficial if preservice field experiences in middle schools were provided (Butler and Dickinson, 1987).

Education for middle school teachers has been a concern for practitioners in the area; however, the area has not been the focus of research to a large degree as compared to other areas and levels of education (Manning, 1989-90). The preparation and experiences provided for preservice middle school teachers has been an area of neglect in an otherwise positive period of interest and need for middle school educators.

Research efforts must be directed toward investigating the needs of teachers who work at the middle school level as well as the needs of preservice education students who seek middle school teaching credentials. According to the National Middle School Association 1988-89 Resolutions, middle school teachers need specialized skills, attitudes, and understanding unique to the middle school concept. Furthermore, the need for training of preservice middle school teachers must be addressed. According to the Resolutions:

> ". . . all who have responsibility for preparing and promoting the continued growth of middle level educators, carefully define the roles of middle grades teachers and provide the resources required to develop competent, caring personnel"
> (NMSA, 1989).

The literature has shown that middle school teachers need to develop an understanding of the students with whom they work. The current study explores the recommendation of practitioners at the middle level regarding preservice needs for future middle level teachers.

Methods and Data Source

Much has been written about the characteristics unique to the transescent age group. In addition to the unique characteristics, a relationship between the needs of the students and the teaching strategies for optimal learning has clearly been established. Finally, and importantly, the need for specialized training experiences for preservice middle level

teachers has not been the topic of scrutiny as has such training for other levels of education.

Based on the need indicated by the review of literature in the area of preparation for preservice middle level teachers, the current study explores the opinions expressed by practitioners regarding the need for specialized training at the preservice level. The procedures and materials used in this study were designed to gain information concerning the need for training as well as the unique needs of middle level students. Major research questions in the study were: Do you think that middle school teachers should receive instruction in the developmental needs of students in the middle grades? Are their needs unique?

The study was limited in scope as the questionnaire was designed to serve as an information gathering tool to determine if a similar survey given a greater scale might be useful in planning courses at the college level in the area of middle school eduction. The population for the current study was made up of the faculty at two public middle schools from a rural county system in central Alabama. These practitioners were asked to complete the questionnaire on a voluntary and anonymous basis with the understanding that the findings would be used only in a positive way. The total of fifty faculty members, all current middle school practitioners, were asked to participate in the study. Of the fifty

questionnaires distributed, thirty-four were completed for a return rate of sixty-eight percent.

Findings

Question 1. Do you think that middle school teachers should receive instruction in the developmental needs of students in the middle grades?

Of the thirty-four questionnaires returned, twenty-seven (approximately 80 percent) respondents answered favorably concerning the need for specialized instruction of preservice middle school teachers. Seven (approximately 20 percent) of the respondents answered unfavorably.

Question 2. Are their needs unique?

Twenty-eight (approximately 82 percent) of the thirty-four questionnaires returned by respondents answered favorably concerning the uniqueness of needs by middle school students. Four (approximately 12 percent) responded unfavorably, and two respondents (approximately 6 percent) did not answer question two.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The findings of the current study indicate that a number of middle school practitioners feel that preservice teachers in the area of middle school education would benefit from classes with special emphasis on the developmental and unique needs of the transescent students with whom they will work. This information leads to the conclusion that increased specialized classes, which include field experiences, should be recommended for exploration or implementation at the college level.

The study further indicates that a need does exist for such a survey on a broader scale to validate the findings and recommendations concerning the planning of course content at the college level in middle school education. More research is needed regarding the opinions of practitioners concerning the areas they believe, based on experience, would be most beneficial for preservice middle school teachers.

References

Alexander, W.M. & McEwin, C.K. (1984). Training the middle level educator: Where does the solution lie? *NASSP Bulletin*, 68 (473), 6-11.

Alexander, W.M. & McEwin, C.K. (1988). *Preparing to teach at the middle level.* Columbus, OH: National Middle School Association.

Butler, D.A. & Dickinson, T.S. (1987). Learning the middle school concept through field based experiences. *Middle School Journal*, 18 (4), 37-39.

Clark, S.N. & Clark D.N. (1987). Middle level programs: More than academics. *Middle School Journal*, 19 (1), 24-26.

Dorman, G. and Lipsitz, J. (1981). Early adolescent development. In G. Dorman (Ed.), *Middle grades assessment program*. Carrboro, NC: Center for Early Adolescence.

Drash, A. (1980). Variations in pubertal development and the school system: A problem and a challenge. In D. Steer (Ed.), *The emerging adolescent characteristics and educational implications.* Columbus, OH: National Middle School Association.

Epstein, H.T. and Toepfer, C.F. Jr., (1978). A neuroscience basis for reorganizing middle school education. *Educational Leadership*, 36, 656-660.

Eichorn, D. (1966). *The middle school.* New York: The Center for Applied Research in Eduction.

Elkind, D. (1967). Egocentrism in adolescence. *Child Development*, 38, 1025-1034.

George, Paul. (1988). Tracking and ability grouping: Which way for the middle school? *Middle School Journal*, 20 (1), 21-28.

Hill, J.P. (1980). *Understanding early adolescence: A framework.* Carraboro, NC: Center for Early Adolescence.

Kasak, D.T. (1988). Changeable you—the other transition in middle school. *Middle School Journal*, 19 (2), 14-15.

Lipsitz, J. (1984). *Successful schools for early adolescents.* New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books.

Manning, M. Lee (1989). Multicultural education. *Middle School Journal*, 20 (4), 14-16.

Manning, M. Lee (1989-90). Contemporary studies of teaching behaviors and their implications for middle level teacher education. *Action in Teacher Education*, 9 (4), 1-5.

National Middle School Association. (1989). National middle school association 1988-89 resolution. *Middle School Journal*, 20 (3), 18-20.

Popejoy, W. D. (1980). Piaget and middle school teaching. In D. Steer (Ed.), *The emerging adolescent characteristics and educational implications*. Columbus, OH: National Middle School Association.

Roach, P.B., Bell, D., and Salmeri, E.R. (1989-90). The home-school link: New dimensions in the middle school preservice curriculum. *Action In Teacher Education*, 11 (4), 14-17.

Strahan, D., and Toepfer, C. J. (1984). The impact of brain research on education: Agents of change. In M. Frank (Ed.), *A Child's Brain*. New York: Haworth Press.